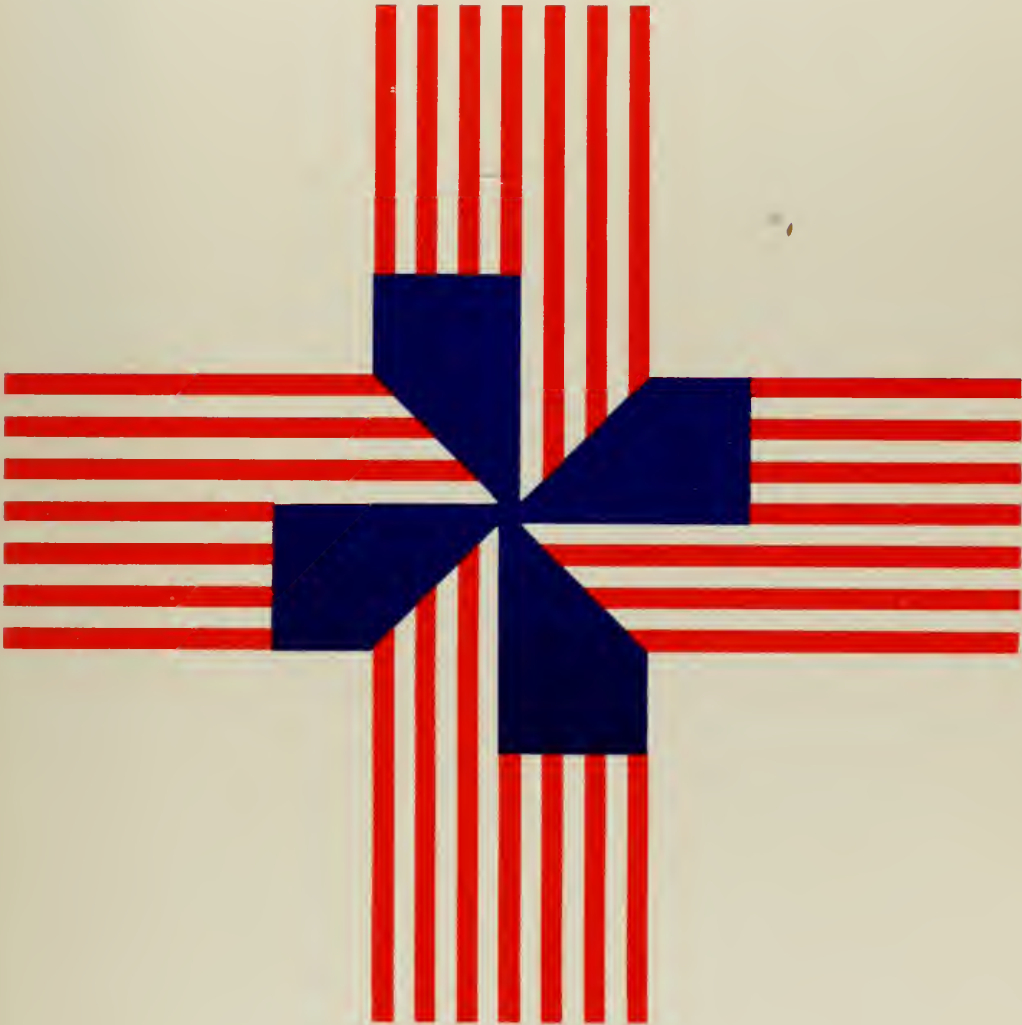



VOL. XXVIII
NO. 4
SUMMER, 1979
ONE DOLLAR

Four
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Quarters





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Four Quarters

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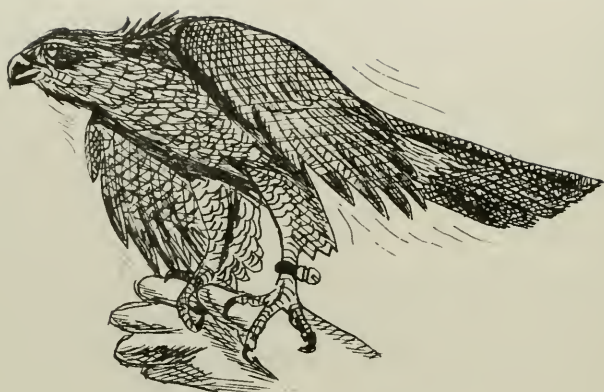
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CATBIRD SEAT

Reflecting on my editorial correspondence of the last year, I'm moved to write in praise of Small. Not Small as a social or economic concept: John Keenan wrote a deadly accurate "Marginalia" on that topic in our Spring, 1977 issue. Being a more single-minded type than my predecessor, I'm attracted more to the literary implications of the idea.

I've received quite a number of cover-letters this year informing me that the enclosed story is part of a story-cycle that the author is at work on. And even when I'm not so informed, I've developed a sixth sense about when a cycle is involved that's been confirmed by replies to some of my letters of rejection. (When the first page of a story is numbered "187," it's not too difficult to surmise that something's up. But I've been right even when the author has changed the numbering).

I said "letters of rejection"—and that's usually the case. These stories tend not to work, and I think I know why.

As I indicated in my first "Catbird," one of the big advantages of this job is an enhanced awareness of literature and its mutations. In this case I've become much more aware of the story-cycle as a part
(continued on page 34)

The Sound of Glass

GEORGE K. DIEHL

Have you ever listened to the pleasant sound of glasses as they were struck together in a toast? Or perhaps you've held a glass by its stem and flicked your fingers at its rim, convinced that the more musical the sound the better the quality of the glass. It was undoubtedly such musical ringing that inspired past imaginations to wonder whether these sounds could not be made to ring toward another end. And there was born the idea of a glass becoming a musical instrument. Why not? Men had drawn music from string stretched on a piece of well-turned wood, had blown through artfully shaped piecing of metal tubing, and struck membranes stretched taut across the tops of vessels.

Late medieval Arabians and Persians spoke of playing on "musical bowls" and "musical cups." Made of earthenware, the vessels were filled with varying quantities of water to produce differences in pitch. Given enough bowls of different sizes filled with water to various levels, an almost limitless variety of pitches could be produced. Accustomed to playing drums, they struck these cups with sticks or beat them with reeds. Gradually earthenware was replaced by glass, which proved to be a more sensitive medium. As soon as the responsiveness of glass was recognized, the sound-producing technique was altered from one of percussion to one of friction. The human hand replaced the stick, and the most sensitive part of the hand, the fingertip, became the sound activator. By moistening it and rubbing it in a circular motion around the rim of the water-tuned glasses, they could be made to emit an almost nondescript sound. Subtleties not possible before suddenly became available. The tone could be continuous and made louder or softer by controlling the amount of pressure applied. The result was a sound that is certainly musical in nature yet doesn't resemble either a human voice or an instrument. It was likened to the singing of nightingales. Some described it as seemingly emerging from infinite space and fading away into endlessness. Others even spoke of it as the music of the angels.

The extraordinary fascination for the sound contributed greatly to the glasses' popularity, which began to rise sharply shortly before the middle of the eighteenth century, when the moistened-finger technique became established. Although high society could not claim exclusive responsibility for their increasing vogue, it was where the art of playing them was most avidly cultivated. Numerous allusions in French and German novels and plays, as well as in memoirs and newspapers, attest to their popularity on the continent. Across the channel, Oliver Goldsmith, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, makes reference to two richly dressed young English ladies who are introduced to the company as women of great distinction and fashion. At the elegant supper following the dance they talk "of nothing but high life and high-lived company; with other fashionable topics such as pictures, taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses."

Outstanding virtuosos began to appear. An Irishman, Richard Pockrich, became a performer of considerable renown. Born around 1690, he began performing on the Glasses in the 1740s: he was the idol of the smart set and gave concerts and demonstrations on his "Angelick Organ" in various parts of England. A distinguished chemist, Edward Hussey Delaval (1729-1814) was a ranking player who numbered among his achievements the manufacture of England's most impressive and complete set of Musical Glasses. Even that distinguished composer for the musical theatre, Christoph Willibald Gluck, felt a fleeting creative spark for the glasses. An April, 1746 concert program for London's Haymarket Theater reveals that Mr. Gluck will play "A Concert upon Twenty-six Drinking Glasses, tuned with Spring Water, accompanied with the whole band, being a new instrument of his own invention, upon which he performs whatever may be done on a violin or harpsichord."

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WAS IN LONDON on a diplomatic mission for the State of Pennsylvania at a time when a number of these virtuosos were flourishing. He heard Pockrich and Delaval perform and became seriously interested in this strange kind of music-making, which was an ear-catching diversion from his other cultivated musical interests. Quickly, Franklin noticed certain distinct shortcomings, and his inventive mind began to envision ways of improving on what he heard.

Since the player moistened his fingers by dipping them into the water-filled glasses on which he was performing, the concomitant reduction in quantity plus some evaporation could occasion undesirable pitch deviations. Of course, an experienced player could accomplish any necessary retuning smoothly and deftly, but

still it was a bothersome detail that required attention. And should the glasses go unplayed for a period of time, one was faced with the time-consuming chore of tuning the complete set. Sometimes projected performances that required fresh tuning met with humorously disastrous results, as the occasion on which Pockrich had advertised in a small English town that he would give a recital on the glasses. On the appointed day he was busily engaged in the tedious tuning operation, when near its completion a sow got loose from its pen and went on a spree. The inevitable happened, ending what promised to be an evening of delightful entertainment.

It also bothered Franklin that, considering the sizes of the glasses and the way they had to be distributed on the table, it was possible to play only one note at a time with each hand—with difficulty perhaps two. The instrument that Franklin set about inventing solved both these problems in one stroke of ingenuity. Here is what he did. He had a set of graduated glass bowls made in such a way that a spindle could be passed through them horizontally. The bowls could then be made to sit inside one another, but without touching. This brought the rims much closer than when they were placed separately on a table. The happy result meant that a series of notes could now be played simultaneously and that the general technique of playing was greatly improved. The glasses no longer had to be tuned by water. Of course, each bowl did have to be carefully blown and ground to a specific pitch, but this was a manufacturing detail and no longer the responsibility of the performer. The horizontal spindle holding the glasses was set on side frames approximately waist-high so that the player could sit comfortably before the instrument. The spindle was rotated by means of a flood treadle like that on a spinning wheel. Finger moistening still had to be employed in order to create the sound. This, too, was later eliminated by attaching a shallow trough of water through which the rims of the crystal bowls—at least half of them—could pass as the spindle revolved.

The set of thirty-seven bowls ranged in size from nine-and-a-half inches for the lowest tone to three inches for the highest. The range of musical pitch was from about F below middle C to F above high C, three octaves away. Such, at least, was the range of a fairly good-sized instrument. By contrast, the typical eighteenth-century set of musical glasses consisted of about eighteen water-tuned glasses arranged in a single file on a cloth-covered board. Others had the glasses arranged in rows in a large wooden box, the lid of which could be folded back and made to serve as a music stand. Such instruments appear as miniatures in comparison with

some of the mammoth glassworks that one hears about in the nineteenth century. For example, in Scotland in 1823 there was a performance by three players on over one-hundred-and-twenty glasses, the largest of which held three gallons and the smallest of which was the size of a thimble, the whole providing a six-octave scale.

Franklin needed a name for his instrument. Since he believed that it was peculiarly adapted to Italian music, he decided to call it an "armonica," in honor of the musical Italian language. Having christened it, he proudly announced that "the advantages of this instrument are that its tones are incomparably sweet beyond those of any other; that they may be swelled and softened at pleasure by stronger or weaker pressure of the finger, and continued to any length; and that the instrument, being once well tuned, never again wants tuning." Incidentally, one must not be bothered by the absence of the "h," as one is accustomed to its presence in the English and German forms of the word. The German language identifies three types of harmonica: the *Glasharmonika*, which is Franklin's instrument; the *Mundharmonika*, which is the common mouth organ; and the *Ziehharmonika*, which is the accordian. Franklin's name for his instrument has nothing whatever to do with what we commonly think of as a harmonica. Although the Italian word "armonica" does refer to the latter, Franklin's intention was to associate it specifically with his tuned-glass instrument.

Even though subtle sonic and acoustical differences between the armonica and the glasses must have been perceptible to discerning ears, the enthralling effect on which the glasses had built their reputation was apparently not altered by Franklin's technological improvements. His wife's initial reaction to the instrument is proof of that. When Franklin returned to America, he assembled the armonica in the attic of his Philadelphia home late at night, after the household had retired, and proceeded to draw forth its "angelick strains"; Mrs. Franklin awakened with the conviction that she had died and gone to heaven and was listening to the music of the angels.

THE ARMONICA'S POPULARITY made rapid strides. By 1764 it had made its appearance in England, Italy and Austria—in that country's musical capital, Vienna, no less. Its first recorded appearance in Philadelphia was in December of the same year. A few months later, George Washington, writing at Williamsburg, recorded in his diary, "By my Exps to hear the Armonica 3.9." The instrument gained recognition all along the eastern United States. References to performances are found in

New York, Philadelphia, Charleston and Petersburg. It is, however, in Germany that one witnesses its principal development and the most numerous contributions to its repertory. The fact that the surviving and other known literature for the instrument is German serves as some indication of its widespread popularity there.

For a while, the armonica and the musical glasses enjoyed a concurrent history. The former—thanks to the activity of traveling virtuosos and the interest of amateurs—flourished between 1765 and 1830. But, eventually, it was the simpler and less expensive musical glasses that supplanted the armonica in popularity. Not, however, before some distinguished composers had fallen under its spell. One highly respected armonicist, Marianne Davies, the Englishwoman who was largely responsible for introducing the instrument on the continent, became known to the Mozart family in 1771. She and her singer sister, Cecilia, had already performed in Vienna on 27 June 1769 at the marriage of the Archduchess Amalia to Duke Ferdinand of Parma, for which occasion the court poet, Pietro Metastasio, had composed an ode which Johann Adolf Hasse set to music for Soprano with Armonica accompaniment. The contact with the Mozarts is made clear in a letter that Leopold Mozart wrote from Milan to his wife on 21 September 1771. Another letter from Vienna on 12 August 1773 relates that the young Wolfgang had played on Friedrich Meshmer's armonica. Mozart became sufficiently intrigued with Franklin's instrument to compose a solo for it, an *Adagio* (K.356=617A). And in 1791, the last year of his life, he wrote what is certainly one of the finest works in the armonica's repertory, the *Adagio and Rondo* (K. 617) for Glass Harmonica, Flute, Oboe, Viola and Violin-cello for Marianne Kirchgaessner, a blind armonicist. She gave it its first performance in Vienna's Kaerntnerthor Theater on 19 August 1791. Beethoven included an armonica accompaniment to spoken words in his incidental music to Friedrich Duncker's play *Leonore Prohaska* (1815). Some lesser figures also contributed to its repertory, perhaps more in the name of curiosity and experiment. One of these, Johann Gottlieb Naumann, made a rather notable contribution in the form of *Six sonates pour l'Harmonica qui peuvent servir aussi pour le Piano Forte, dédiés à Monsieur le Baron Patrick d'Alstroemer*.

Obviously, the fact that the musical glasses and armonica were relatively easy to play, at least in the first stages, accounted in large measure for their extraordinary vogue. The title-page of Ann Ford's method for the glasses appeared in the *Public Advertiser* of 2 November 1761 and testified to its appeal as follows: "By Miss Ford,/Instructions/for Playing on the Musical

Glasses:/so that/any Person, who has the least Knowledge of/Music, or a good Ear, may be able to perform/in a few Days,/if not in a few Hours./With Clear and Proper/Directions/How/to provide a compleat Set of Well-Tuned Glasses, at a/very moderate Expence." What could be more tempting to a music-minded novice of the eighteenth century than to be able to join the ranks of the performer in perhaps just a few hours?

POPULAR AS THESE INSTRUMENTS WERE, all was not well. Although possible curative effects on certain disorders of the blood by the use of such liquids as brandy, wine, water, or oil (corresponding to the four humours of the body) were suggested by the Nuernberg academician Georg Philipp Harsdoerffer in his *Deliciae physicomathematicae* (1677), such a potentially positive feature was ultimately offset by an entirely opposite result: this unassuming, apparently harmless collection of glass had a deleterious effect on the mental health of quite a few of its practitioners. In certain German towns the instruments even became the object of a police ban. Literature on the armonica does, indeed, reveal sporadic but nevertheless persistent references to the melancholic and harmful nature of its sounds. It was apparently capable of creating feelings that were detrimental to the esthetic equilibrium of particular players. We know, for example, that the two ladies (Davies and Kirchgaessner) who had played such prominent roles in the armonica's popularity had to cease playing because of nervous disorders. Conceivably, the physical vibrations, transferred through the fingers, produced real and measurable physiological effects which in turn manifested themselves in psychological disturbances. One eighteenth-century source attributes to its tones the power to reconcile quarreling friends, to restore fainting men to consciousness, to make women faint, to send a dog into convulsions, to make a sleeping girl wake screaming through a chord of the diminished seventh, and even cause the death of one very young. (See A. Hyatt King's comprehensively documented article on the musical glasses and armonica in the *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association*, 1945-46, p. 114). Curt Sachs (in *The History of Musical Instruments*, New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1940, p. 405) thinks its unnerving effect was produced by the "irritating permance of extremely high partials and the continuous contact of the sensitive fingertips with the vibrating bowls."

Undoubtedly much depended on the temperament of the player. Benjamin Franklin played on it for years without any apparent harm. But others' careers as performers were eventually brought to a disturbing end as a result of the instrument's "annoying" powers. Even though it must have occurred to someone

like Mesmer, a reputedly good player, to press the armonica's highly emotional tones into clinical service as an hypnotic aid to induce a receptive state in his patients, there were continued efforts to subdue its supramusical potency. Artificial pads were tried so that the fingertips would not have to come in contact with the rims, and Franklin himself experimented with a method of playing by the use of corks. Someone tried using violin bows and all along there were attempts at keyboard attachments. Francis Hopkinson of Philadelphia experimented along this line. In fact, Thomas Jefferson was so impressed with Hopkinson's project that he made what now seems like an inflated proclamation when he said "It will be the greatest present which has been made to the musical world this century, not excepting the Pianoforte" and lost no time in reporting the same to the noted English traveler and writer on musical subjects, Charles Burney. Miss Ford had already anticipated the keyboard device when she wrote her method. In fact, she had discussed it with an organ builder who reportedly was to have manufactured an "Organ with Glass Notes." None of these remedial measures seemed to be of any particular value, and ultimately the armonica contributed to its own diminishing popularity.

Occasionally one hears of a revived interest in these instruments. In 1956, the bicentennial of Mozart's birth and the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Franklin's, the former's quintet was played on a reproduction of the latter's armonica at a concert in Boston with the American organist E. Power Biggs. The work was heard previously in London in 1938, with Bruno Hoffman playing the armonica part on water-tuned glasses.

In the creation of instruments for music, man has exhibited much ingenuity over the centuries. He has invented crudely as well as with unbelievable sophistication, and the products of his invention have brought him unbounded pleasures. His instruments have both called for his assistance in producing their sounds and stood free of his involvement beyond his making them capable of operating mechanically. A list of all varieties in all ages and cultures would seem endless, and no sooner would one believe to have cited them all than another would be awaiting recognition. It shouldn't surprise us that the sound of glass brought with it its own fascination as a potential instrument for music, unlikely as it seemed at first. Glasses were not made for that purpose, but man heard them and was seduced by their musical ringing. The chapter that they contributed to our musical and social history was a curious one indeed, and their propagation was in no small measure due to the efforts of an American enthusiast. Once heard, their "angelick strains" are not easily forgotten.

A Month in the Country

J. D. McCLATCHY

The weather? Oh, we had our share of days
In the shingle style—wooden, rustic, washed
To the shades of gray in my snapshots of the rest.
Which were as shrill as a jay's hue and cry,
And drained down the sky's white-hot hole
Into nights with star-chokers tight enough
To make our tumblers tremble, as we sat out
In a chirr of crickets synced with surface noise
From the worn grooves of some *Chanson des Cigales*
Turning tables inside. So much better, it seemed,
Than last year's frame house, explosive and clammy,
In a borderline state, where you read to write,
Blue with old glory, and I would double over
To watch myself darken in a bellybuttoned pool
Of sweat, hemisphere of a world well lost to self.

Light motives. Shadow play. Those first mornings
Our fingers drummed to an egg's three-minute waltz,
The coffee expressly instant, and blender juice
Half air, half orange, like the cheap posters taped
Up in the kitchen. But afternoons—or rather, words
We misread as “afternoons”—grew more pronounced
In the trees, warning of a sentence soon to be imposed.
And as if in time, by Sunday's diminished seventh,
The tutor had arrived. From out of nowhere, he said.

Thin fantast who made his bid—that nothing we had
Was enough—he seemed more like a child accusing us
With what we'd long ago learned, all the instances
Of second thought, without climax or value.
But as he stayed, the stinging risks began to swarm
Around the room. Our wills lay in pieces. Day by day,
Deep in a brown study, we wrestled with angles
On the issue of our age: the birth of a hero,
Stranger to variety, monotonously courting ideas
As a testimony, a metonymy of the utter vision
Tradition has of him, its own imaginings a delaying
Sense of failure. It seemed possible, after all.

We both slipped messages under the scholar's door,
Explaining ourselves, excusing the other . . . how
We'd lost heart, or why happiness again proposed
A dishonored profit we longed to have shares in.
He burned our notes, and left the glossy ashes
As directions on his bed. With no choice but to
Follow, we searched the hedged paths, paced off
The high bluffs from which the water was all
Perspective and glare—guilt's long mirrored
Corridor, its farthest reaches erased by fog.
Seabirds caught a drift we kept missing

Between ourselves. Excerpts in the past tense
Stuck out, like the edges of a rugged ode,
To trip us up, between the lines. Turning,
We stumbled into the hollow realization
That he was gone for good, and you said,
"Let's remember this moment, and refer to it
As the moment we'll always remember." Done.
The way back, through vacant lots, flashed
With denials and nostalgia, the aesthetic of mal-
Adjusted renters. The house sat as forsaken
As a flower maiden in her garden plot still hung
With favors. And what is fair or due? Thoughts
Hitch in the damp patterns of an actual scene.

So we returned to the city—what else was there
To do?—to the highrise of a different season
In the same life, looking out on panels
Of flat affect. At first they seemed sloops
Flush with the sun's own last embarrassments.
But soon I caught on. Those vessels were combed
With people eating, arguing, worried with love
And debts and the disappearing acts of quick-change
Artists. The year, all their years, our years
Bear down on us, on schedule. But some moments
Are agreed upon, and we remember a few broken weeks
Of promises kept in sequences of air and earth
And imminence. Whole convoys of shuttered houses
Stall for a glance back that cancels the passage,
Then straighten up and cut ahead toward morning.

Morning Thoughts

(The Playing Field: La Salle College)

CLAUDE KOCH

Behind the Quad the morning sun
Skillfully rummages, numbering the leaves,
Singling out with a jeweler's eye
Cave after leafy cave—a spy
For you and me.

But here the field's civility
Lies in its reticence, its fine
Attention to our morning needs.
There is no shadow laid down, not one—
There is no tree.

No error to stumble on, no sin,
A time for the naming of beasts, a time
for you and me to be innocent in,
A visitation of light upon
Virginity.

Such openness of blue and green . . .
This adamant first base line
Receding into genesis,
Lucid and brown and fine,
Comes late for us;

Defines the tranquilly precise
Allowance of the earth and sky.
These basic marks un-complicate
A fellow's brow; one is apprised
Of his lost state.

What though things wait the obvious ?—
The practical disport of day,
The baffled runner caught off base,
The fervent guardian at the plate—
And, always, dust.

The Last Season

ROBERT GORDON

WALLY LOOPER WAS THE FIRST GUY to notice it. "There's weather in here," he said.

I looked up at the lights in the Spacedome, the non-glare E-Z Glo's that you could look right at when you were following a high pop fly and not get blinded by. All I saw was maybe a bank of cigarette smoke that the air-conditioning hadn't cleared out yet.

"You're out of your mind," I said.

"It's the truth, I swear it. This place has wind currents."

Wally was a pretty steady player, so I didn't want to argue with him. I always thought they kept the temperature in that particular Spacedome a couple of degrees too high, but it was San Antonio after all, and I guess they like it warm a little better than I did. My own house was near the ball park in Twin Cities, so I was used to cold, at least outdoors.

Cold weather, snow and ice, rain—that was why they'd built the forty-eight Spacedomes. Some were a little bigger than others, maybe twenty or thirty thousand seats, but not enough so you'd notice. They all had color-fast chemical grass that felt like doormats and fantastic electronic scoreboards for commercials and cartoons and a big fixed steel bubble-dome painted in pale-blue acrylic, up higher than anybody could ever dream of hitting. They were absolutely weather-tight. The four Leagues had agreed to all the measurements—no more short left fields, no blind spots—and they all had to be kept at the same humidity and heat levels. It didn't matter where you played, it was great anyplace—Vancouver, Tulsa, Havana, they all had the same environment. Only that, like I said, some of them were bigger than others.

Anyway, I forgot what Wally was talking about until I went out to center field for the last of the ninth. We were up by a run, but they had a man on second. The batter took a called strike and a ball, and on the third pitch he hit the easiest out you've ever seen. I didn't even have to run to get under it. I held up my mitt and watched it fall. It was like slow-motion, it was so easy—and then I felt a breeze on my cheek, not hard, but enough so I noticed. And

you never felt a breeze in those parks. It got stronger, all in a few seconds, and while I was wondering what was going on, the ball swung a little in its drop. Maybe four or six inches, just like it was outside in the wind. And it went by me. I don't mean I dropped it. I missed it. It sank right past me, bounced on that green plastic, and lay there. By the time I'd scooped it up and pegged it home, the runner had scored. The crowd started shouting at me, laughing and booing and cracking jokes. After that I kind of fell apart. I thought I felt wind moving all around me. The game wound up tied because of me, we had to play a tenth, and in that one they held us without a hit while they managed to get another run.

In the locker room I took a lot of abuse from everybody. Everybody, that is, except Wally. He just patted me on the shoulder and said, "See what I mean?"

THE NEXT NIGHT we were in Mexico City. That's pretty high up, a mile or so, but the pressure-gauges kept the air thicker than it's supposed to be at that altitude. (That was one of the agreements that got Mexico City into the League—it had to have air pressure the same as the average in all the other parks.) Those Mexicans are crazy people. They scream a lot, and when they get excited they like to throw things. But the Leagues had the domes designed with a see-through rim all around, like a window wall, to protect the players. Also, that way you lost fewer balls because they bounced back before people could get their hands on them. Anyway, there we were. There was some booing and laughing when my name got flashed out on the scoreboard; everybody must have been watching TV the night before. (On the phone my wife said they showed a close-up of me while I stood under the ball waiting. Then she said she still loved me anyway—that was a joke we had when something went wrong—but I wasn't sure it made me feel any better.) Wally Looer made a point of sitting next to me on the bench, and he kind of gave me the creeps by saying, "I wonder if it's the same down here."

Nothing unusual happened for four or five innings. I thought once or twice maybe I felt a little wind, but I put that down to nerves. Charlie Fessen, when he got up to the plate, all of a sudden started rubbing his eyes; he said something had blown in his eye, a cinder maybe. He couldn't see right, or at least he said so, and in a minute he'd fanned out. But that could have happened anywhere.

What couldn't have happened anywhere was the next thing. I was looking over toward third—I was out in the field in the sixth—when I noticed everything was in shadows all around the base: the baseman, the coach, everybody was dark gray. I took a look at the ceiling, as far up as it was—and I couldn't see the bank of lights. It

was like they were behind thick clouds. Then I realized it *was* clouds. Right over third. I tried to pay attention to the game again—I didn't want a repeat of last night's performance—but I started to worry. Just then—it was one of those funny quiet moments you get in a game, when you hear the hot-dog guys shouting and nobody else seems to be saying anything—I heard the thunder. So did everybody else. We all looked up. Up over the stands was a mess of black clouds, like a real summer storm, and out of it was coming thunder and lightning. The game just stopped. We were all staring up, but by now the dome had disappeared. It was getting dark all over, the crowd began moaning and praying, and just then a bolt of lightning zapped out and popped down about six feet from the left-fielder! It was poor Charlie Fessen. He jumped as if he'd been hit, and then he started running. He ran to the dugout and dove in. That would have been crazy enough, but right behind him came the rain. It started to pour, all around third. We stood there for a minute watching, and then we ran too. It was only the sixth inning, and we waited for a while, but the crowd began to go home and all the playing surfaces got slippery. The managers and the umps consulted, and then they called the game. It was the first time in history a game ever got called off on account of rain—indoors, over third base.

AFTER THAT things got worse. Sometimes it would snow all over the whole park, other times just on the cheap seats. Sleet fell one night in New Orleans, eighth inning, score tied nothing-all, and us up at bat. Both teams said we'd keep on playing, but the umps said no. Almost as soon as they waved us off the field, it stopped. Too late, though; we had to be rescheduled.

By the end of the season, or what would have been the end of the season, there were 271 games left to play. The owners juggled some tricky little clauses in the contracts (the kind of things you never notice when you're signing), the Leagues put on the old squeeze, every player got a twenty-five percent bonus—and it still took until the middle of January to get rid of the games. By then the TV was all switched over onto basketball and hockey, which meant our coverage was lousy. But soon those teams started having trouble too. A lot of times the cameras would just be showing clouds, or maybe fog would smoke over the baskets or the hockey goal. Guys were playing by sense of touch. Meanwhile the engineers were crawling all over every Spacedome, testing, but nobody could find any answers.

It made a long season—the longest one on record. The World Series had to compete with the Winter Olympics. When it was all over, every baseball team in the country felt used up. Nobody'd

been hurt yet—mostly it was just skin abrasions, because in some of the parks the rugs shrank from the rain—but we all shook a lot. A runner on the Winnipeg Wheaties cracked an anklebone when he tripped over a seam, and my buddy Yogi Yushimura tore out the seat of his pants when he tried to steal home and hit a zipper. But, like I said, nothing serious.

Spring training was bad. All the guys were edgy, and they'd only had a six-week layoff. My own bunch started out mean, real mean, which wasn't like them. But this year was different. Everybody had the jumps, especially when there was a three-day blizzard in the Miami Spacedome and we had to cancel a week's exhibition games. It got so you were always looking over your shoulder to see what was going to happen, weatherwise.

ANYWAY, I WAS THERE the night it all blew up. Lots of people tell you they were, but I really was. I'll cut the season short except to say that in spite of our nerves we were maybe a little looser than some of the other teams. We made it through the top of the League—just barely; won the playoffs in the MiniSeries (that was in December, so the schedule was a little better than the year before); and went into the Series with Chicago. The front office had *mucho* trouble selling seats, because it was the week before Christmas, and I never saw two teams so anxious to wrap it all up and go home.

Nothing happened the first three games except a shower the first night, right after "The Star-Spangled Banner." But the fourth game—it was a Wednesday, I'll never forget it—it started to get dark at the bottom of the fifth. The electricians said later they turned up all the lights in the place as far as they would go, but it didn't do any good. I was out in center as usual, so I had a good view. I heard a funny noise, like a big windstorm, only different. It got stronger and stronger. Then Wally Looer, on first, pointed over at the scoreboard. It was flashing PLEASE WALK TO THE EXITS IN ORDERLY FASHION DO NOT RUN over and over, in case anybody was watching. Behind the plastic screen I could see thousands of people running like thieves, screaming and yelling and trampling each other. Overhead was a big black cloud like a funnel, and I knew right away it was a tornado. I'd read about them, even if I'd never seen one. It was sucking up programs and cans of soda pop, and then it began to slant over toward the diamond. I started to move the same minute, as fast as I could, but that thing was faster than I was. On the mound ahead of me was Hymie Rodriguez, just standing there staring up. I felt the air rising around me, and I dove for second base. They'd begun anchoring them down extra hard the season

before, and I grabbed on with both arms. A noise like a subway train roared all around me, and first my legs and then my body were scooped up into the air. But I held on, and in a second or two it went past me. I thought I saw Hymie still standing there, but I couldn't be sure. When it was all over, maybe two minutes later, the funnel had crashed up against the boxes and burst into sheets of rain, and then there was nothing at all but an awful quiet.

Tom Haber, the manager, crept out of the dugout just as I was getting up to a crouch. Some of the guys followed him, and the same on the Chicago side.

"Where's Rodriguez?" Haber shouted.

Nobody knew. Everybody'd seen him on the mound, standing like he was hypnotized, but nobody saw him go. He just disappeared into the tornado, and that was it. It was too bad, too; he'd been having a real good year. They named a street after him down in Santo Domingo.

All that night the Commissioner and the owners and coaches met, and by noon the next day they'd decided—I should have said we were ahead 2-1 in games—that we'd won the Series, the only three-game Series on record. Next they closed down all the domes while they tried to think up what to do. It was one bad January, I can tell you that.

WHAT THEY DECIDED was to play outdoors; so that spring we made the big switch. They broke up all the asphalt in the parking lots—in most cities, those were the only flat places that were big enough—and laid out the diamonds. For parking, it was the Spacedomes. The opener got held up a few weeks, but by May we went outside, the cars and buses went inside, and it was time to play ball again.

Trouble was, nobody liked being outside. The air was too lively, and you had to keep checking the flags to see which way the wind was blowing. Or a hard drive could take a ball right out of the park. Besides, when the fans would go back into the Spacedomes to get their cars, as often as not it would be pouring. Or else they'd be buried in a foot of snow, and you had thirty thousand guys getting heart attacks while they were digging out. People worried more about what they'd find when they went to go home than what the score was. For a while they brought umbrellas and windbreakers and shovels, and they put on snow tires, even in L.A. But finally they just got tired of coming.

After that, when the Feds decided the domes were a national health hazard, that was it. They tore them down and put up the Metrohousing. Those buildings can hold twice as many people as

the ballparks ever did, in the same amount of land; so as far as that's concerned, I suppose it's okay. But it was the end of the great American game.

When you've spend as many years at something as me, it's tough just knocking around. Sure, I have my pension and my investments; but what do you do with your time? I try coaching the kids, when they can pick up some sandlot games. But the City Council doesn't let you stick around very long, because all the land has to be built on. Even the garages are eight, ten stories high. Up on top are the playgrounds with the benches and swings, and if you bat a few fungoes around, you run a terrific chance of knocking a hole in somebody's window. That's a civil infraction, and the cops write you out a ticket every time you do it. But you can't bunt forever.

It's crazy, being out in the dirt and grass—assuming you can find any. The balls take bad hops, and you never know when you'll turn an ankle. And everything's variables, too cold or too hot or too wet. I remember when there was none of this dust or mosquitoes or sun in your eyes, back to the Spacedomes and the way it was then. Baseball was the perfect game, but you can only be perfect in perfect conditions—and they're gone.

Those were the good old days, believe you me.

Night/Late August

MARTIN ROBBINS

This summer heat pulls the stars
Closer. Watching the night's full
Wonder turns time away. Sounds
Waver like wave-lengths from blue
Pulsars;

or crickets tracing

This earth night's steady flicker,
This point that pins my space here,
This hum on the plate of far
Light, this skipped beat when a star
Falls, and a field, still, answers.

Beauty

JOHN GILGUN

MY LAST EXAM was on May 17th and I started working at the paper box factory on the 22nd, so I only got four days off between the time school ended and my summer job began. Betty and myself, we talked about going to the lake, but then it rained and she had to take the place of a girl at the phone company who got sick, so we hung around the apartment. I played with Greg and tried to read a book. On Sunday afternoon we made love and afterwards we talked about going to a movie, but we couldn't get a sitter so we watched TV. The walls of the apartment are thin, and about eight o'clock the old couple next door started to fight. Most of the time they are quiet but once a month they have a fight. Then they cuss each other out and smash things. Their dog goes crazy and barks at them. "Do you think we'll end up like them?," Betty said, just before she turned up the volume on the TV to drown it all out.

Betty's a good wife and mother and I try to be a good husband and father. But we married too young and had a kid too soon. We didn't know how life makes you pay for that kind of recklessness. I'm 24 years old. Flunked out of State in my sophomore year, bummed around a while, played with a band and did the dope scene. But that stuff is for kids and I'm ready to settle down, get my degree, get a good job and make something of myself. But first the degree. No, first the tuition money. No—first the job at the paper box factory.

They took me on there because I'm non-union, temporary summer help, and cheap. I thought the union guys would resent me, but they didn't care. I got the jobs they don't like to do anyway, like sweeping the floor and carrying the trash down to the incinerator, and as summer help I was no threat to them. They called me "Hip," short for "hippie," when they needed me for something. That's because I have long hair and a beard. I don't think they knew my real name, which is Jimmy Lee Evans.

There were a lot of peculiar guys there. One day one of them waited for the foreman in the bushes near the north gate. This guy had come to work drunk and told everyone he was going to bash the foreman's head in with a crowbar. The foreman looked out through a door, saw the guy crouching in the bushes and called the

cops. They arrived too late to catch the guy, who was never seen around the place again, naturally. This was exciting and gave everyone something to talk about for a few days. It also got me off the broom and away from the incinerator, because the foreman put me on the machine this guy had been operating. "You ain't skilled, but you can do this anyhow," he told me. It was a cutting machine, and my job was to lower the knife from a height of four and a half feet to cut the pile of cardboard in two. Twenty sheets of cardboard had to be cut at each lowering, and the job was dangerous. You could lose your fingers. You couldn't come down too hard and you couldn't come down too light. It had to be just right.

I had confidence and the willingness to learn, but it took me longer than I thought it would to get the hang of it. When I found out the thing had a beat to it, like music, I got into that and kind of went with it, and then it wasn't so bad. But after I'd been doing it for two or three weeks my sex life started to suffer: I couldn't make it with Betty. It was caused by the pressure of the job—eight hours a day on that machine—and I knew that. It had happened before, when I was worried about an exam or money to pay bills or Greg being sick or something. It was no big deal and it would pass when the pressure lifted. But the pressure didn't lift. I went back on the Librium the doctor had prescribed for me during the winter. I hated to do it, but I figured I had to. I was jumpy and nervous and afraid I'd fall into the machine. You have to have strong nerves and a steady hand to operate that machine. The foreman told me a lot of guys couldn't handle it and cracked up. But I wasn't going to crack up. I had too much at stake.

My old man told me once, "You have to set yourself a goal and then move toward it. Never let nothin' get in your way. Always keep your eye on that goal." He didn't have a goal and that's why his life was so fouled up. He just drifted. But my life wasn't going to be like that. I was determined to make it different.

Then Betty's mother had a stroke and Betty went down to Little Rock to be with her, taking Greg along. For the first time since we got married—that is, two and a half years—I was on my own. "Don't worry about me," I told her before I put her on the Greyhound, "I'll be OK. I lived alone before I met you and I did OK. I'll be OK now. Anyhow, it's only for two weeks." It was a lie about doing OK when I lived alone. I was stoned all the time in those days, mostly because I was on the road and lonely.

"I'll miss you, Jimmy," she said. Then she was in the bus and I saw her and Greg at one of the windows. She held up his hand and

made him wave goodbye. Then they were gone and I was standing there in the exhaust fumes on the hot downtown street by myself.

MY FATHER DIED A BROKEN MAN and that haunts me. He worked for a trucking company for twenty years and then lost his job because of booze. He died in the state hospital, his mind rotted out by alcohol, aged 56. I've told myself all my life, "That will never happen to me." So when I got married I swore off alcohol, and I've never touched it since, not even a glass of beer or wine with dinner. My father was a failure, but I was determined to succeed, so I kept his image in the front of my mind as I operated my machine. And I kept repeating his advice to me, "You gotta have a goal. Gotta have a goal." I developed muscles I didn't know I had before in my arms and back and my spirit was strengthened too. I began to think I might find religion the way other people did. Once or twice I had the urge to pray as I drove to work.

But the thing that happened had nothing to do with "finding Jesus" or anything like that. No, the thing happened like nothing that had ever happened to anybody before, or if it did they never told me about it. And the thing that happened was, my senses rebelled and went crazy, and I started to see things and smell things and taste things in a way I never had before. And the more I screwed myself down to my work, the more it happened. Things would slip in around the edges of my discipline—beautiful things—and I had no control over them. Like, I'd be standing at my machine covered with sweat, the temperature inside the building 105 degrees, the humidity 99 percent, and something would catch my eye, a light up near the ceiling maybe, and I'd start to freak out. It was like being on drugs in the old days, but it was different, too. I wondered if the drug things could be coming back to me, but I figured that was impossible because it's three years since I took any hallucinogenics. And anyway, as I said, the experiences were different. I stopped taking the Librium just to see what would happen, but the experiences didn't stop. They just kept coming on.

I remember this one. I was with the other guys, walking along the sidewalk, going to lunch. It was a hot, steamy day and everybody was totally bummed out. All of a sudden we turned a corner and there in an open field—really a space full of rubble where a building was being torn down—were two kids, a girl and a boy, tossing a frisbee back and forth. I felt this wave of absolute hatred go up from the guys around me, hatred directed toward the guy and the girl, because they could play on a summer day while we worked. First I was looking at the hatred in the eyes of the guy

next to me, and then I was looking at the frisbee, which was in midair with the sun right above it. I couldn't stop staring at it. It just seemed to hang there against the sun for the longest time. I passed into it and forgot where I was and who I was. I went up into the sky with it and stayed there.

The next thing I knew one of the guys was shaking me by the shoulder saying, "C'mon. Move your ass." Then I was walking along with the others again. I could feel my scalp tingling the way it tingles when I wake up from a real bad dream. That was one of the first of what I called "the beauty things."

But there were others. I'd smell things—like the oil that oozed up through the cracks in the floorboard under my machine—and I'd just go into those smells and lose touch with everything. Then I'd snap back, thinking, "I got to pay attention," because there, right in front of me, was the knife ready to cut my hand off. There was a flower embossed on the frame that held the knife and under the flower the words "W. W. Harris, Inc., Cleveland O." One time the petals of the flower opened up and I was propelled through the center of the thing down a long corridor toward a point of light. I didn't reach the light, but I heard a voice say, "What would happen if you let yourself go further?" Later I'd get an answer to that question.

Then the foreman took me off the machine and sent me back to sweeping the floor. I begged him to give me another chance. "I know I can do it," I said. "It's important to me. Please don't take me off the machine."

"No, we got us a dreamer here," he answered. "And dreamers and machinery, they don't mix."

But the real reason he took me off the machine was, a union man came back from vacation and he was put on it. The foreman had been breaking the rules to put me on it in the first place. He only did it because he was short-handed. But I didn't find out about this till later and I really suffered because it looked like a defeat for me. And what made it worse was, I knew the defeat was meaningless because the job was meaningless. And that meant that I was meaningless, too.

Betty's letters from Little Rock didn't make me feel better. She wrote that her mother was partially paralyzed, and since she had no one there to look after her maybe we should consider having her live with us for a while until she was well enough to take care of herself. But where would we get the money for that? And were we ready to take on that kind of responsibility now? She asked me to check out nursing homes, but I put it off. It was too depressing. I didn't want to think about it.

I began to drift. When work let out, I would drift through

town, looking at things, touching them and smelling them sometimes even tasting them if I could. There were times when everything turned me on—some sunflowers on a junk pile, an old car with a hole in its windshield resting on its side in a gully, the blood on the apron of the owner of a poultry store on Market Street, a sign riddled with bullets on a dirt road on the edge of the city. My eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, tongue were hungry for something, anything, and I didn't care what. I learned that "the beauty things" had to be surprises. I mean, I couldn't look at something and say, "That is beautiful." The thing had to say it to me. And it could be anything—the bricks of an abandoned church or geraniums with dust on their leaves in the front window of some old wino hotel. It didn't matter. If the time was right—especially if it was sunset and the light was right—the things spoke to me and burned themselves into my brain.

One night I didn't go home at all. I just walked all night, slept on the grass in City Hall Park and went to work unshaven, in grass-stained clothes, nervous and tense as a cat. But the dirt and grease ground into the handle of the broom I pushed that day seemed beautiful to me. I must have given people the wrong impression that day because a guy said to me, as I was sweeping down the spiral metal stairs, "Can you get me some of that stuff you're on?"

"I'm not on anything," I said.

The guy screamed with laughter. "The kid says he ain't on nothin'! What's he think I am, a fool?"

THEN, FOR NO REASON AT ALL, the beauty things went away. They just completely left me and I had to face my problems. This happened on a Saturday afternoon. We got off at noon on Saturdays. Guys were heading for the bars on Fourth Street, and all of a sudden it hit me—terrible job, impotence, no money for school, sick mother-in-law! I felt like a fish that's been hooked and is about to be gutted. Of course the fish is dead by the time you gut it. You've brained it on the bottom of the boat by then. But there I was, completely alive, with the jackknife about to slit my belly. I was standing on the curb waiting for the light to change so that I could cross the street. Some guy's wife had come down to pick him up at work and she was standing by her car in the parking lot across the way. Our eyes met and locked together for a minute. I was hurting so much inside at that moment that I almost cried out to her, "Help me! I'm dying inside!" But I didn't cry out, of course. I just stood there while everything I had rushed out of me. And then there I was—a shell.

The following Monday I didn't go to work. They'd have to find

somebody else. There was nothing left of me. I just drove around town all day, looking at people. They were all exactly like me. I observed them on the streets—farmers, housewives, even kids. They were burned out inside, living on nothing but their fear, just like me, and it was a low voltage fear which would never give them enough power to make any changes in their lives. And who was to blame? It was the system, sure. But they were the system and they were doing it to themselves, inside their own heads, every minute of their lives. When “the beauty things” were happening, I knew that life was meant to be wonderful—beautiful, complex, full of color and light, even ecstatic. And if God created men out of beauty and gave them the ability to see beautiful things, what had gone wrong?

For a couple of days I didn't go back to the apartment. The sight of those appliances in the efficiency kitchen, of that furniture which was only partly paid for, paralyzed me and made me think of killing myself. I sat in bars drinking Coke, staring at winos, at broken down whores, at workers who spent their days-off in places like that because home was worse. I saw my father in some of them, because that's what life had meant to him, toward the end, before he was put away.

“You give me the creeps staring at me that way,” a woman said to me one night. “What's the matter with you anyway? What do you want?”

I just kept staring. It had nothing to do with her, really. I was getting the answer to an important question. “If you touch the light it opens for you,” I told myself. “The trick is to touch it before it begins to fade. But if you touch it and go beyond it, there's nothing there, nothing at all.” Once I had the answer I could close my eyes. I could stop staring. So I closed my eyes.

“You're crazy,” the woman said. “You're out of your mind!”

Later I saw her talking to the bartender while glancing in my direction. But the bartender didn't ask me to leave. It was one of those bars where no one is ever asked to leave—unless you die on the premises at which point the cops are called and you're carried out and dumped in the wagon.

I came back to the apartment that night and slept in my own bed, because a thunderstorm had rolled in from the Kansas plains and why walk all night in a thunderstorm? Greg had been conceived in this bed, conceived out of an ecstasy I'd lost. And then tossed out into a world that was terrified of ecstasy and did everything in its power to destroy it. Why had we brought him into the world? Why had we done him that disservice? Maybe some other person had done it, not the Jimmy Lee Evans who lay here tonight listening to the wind and watching the lightning, but someone

else, someone I wouldn't recognize if he came up to me on the street and said, "Hello, old buddy. How's life been treatin' you?"

I had a dream. I was one of three people who had set out to climb a mountain. There was a terrific wind blowing down from the heights which made it dangerous to stand up and move forward. We were crouched over with our backs to the wind. Then I looked over at a neighboring mountain and saw the sun glinting off a snow field there. I cried out, "That is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," because it was. Then, since we couldn't climb any higher, someone suggested we go to a movie. I looked through the paper to see what was playing. The paper said that there had been a flood which had caused all the corpses in the local cemetery to shift slightly in their graves. Every corpse would have to be dug up and buried in some other place, and who wanted to take on a job like that? The names of the dead filled page after page and each name had a picture above it and each picture was of a gravestone. I looked for a long time before I found my own name on one of them.

I woke up, startled by a noise. I thought I had heard our front door opening. It has to be Betty, I thought. I had not replied to her letters and I had not been home recently to answer any phone calls she might have made. A hollow place opened up inside me and I felt myself sliding down into it. It was like rolling backwards through the tunnel in the funhouse at the amusement park knowing the tunnel has no exit at the other end. I listened for her voice, her "Jimmy? Are you home? I'm back. Jimmy, are you here?" But there was no voice. And then I remembered that she couldn't have entered the apartment because I had put the chain up on the inside of the door before I went to bed. No, it wasn't Betty. I had woke in the middle of the day, with the bedroom full of that blinding summer light we get after a thunderstorm, to the sound of the old couple next door letting their dog out to play on the apartment complex patio.

The Octopus Garden

A. de FRANCE

8:15. SATURDAY NIGHT RUSH. The big room fills fast, the smell of December comes in on the tide. Already the bar register is clattering, the girls eddying around the tables, Vinnie raising hell in the kitchen. Helen puts out appetizers for her deuce, sets up her four, takes her drink orders. At the bar, Jack chants the usual warnings in his old-man's voice as his shaky hands measure out the gin: "Watch out for Vinnie, he's nasty as hell tonight."

"What else is new?"

Back through the swinging doors, the kitchen help has paused to watch Vinnie laying into little Frankie, the dishwasher. "I told you before, cups and dessert dishes in separate bins, that's the way we do it!" Head jutting, hands on hips, he stands bristling over the smaller man.

"It doesn't make sense that way, it's more work!" Frankie grumbles back, but his noise is for the waitresses and cooks, not for Vinnie.

"Listen," Vinnie sneers, his strong, dark face twisting to reveal crooked, tobacco-stained teeth. "When *you're* managing this restaurant, *then* you tell me what makes sense." He waits till Frankie has begun re-sorting, then turns and catches Helen staring stupidly. "You," he snaps, "go pick up that new round by the window."

"Angie's six? You want me to set it up for her?"

"I said *take* it. Don't any of you hear English?" He stalks past her toward the dining room, his rotten breath pressing even through his cologne. "Just do what you're told, we're trying to make money here."

As soon as the doors stop swinging, Frankie flings a saucer at some indefinite spot between Helen and the cooks, shattering it on the floor. "He better not try that crap with *me*! He can push the others around, but *I* don't put up with that!" His face grows even more bulge-eyed and hawk-nosed as he bends to his trays. The cooks, shrugging, turn back to their work.

Helen picks up her dinners. "Who's this other Surf-and-Turf for?"

"You," the cook says.

"I said two Surf-and-Turfs, not three."

"You said three."

"Two boiled lobster, two Surf-and-Turf."

The cook snatches up the order slip. "Look. You wrote it. Three."

Helen looks, sees the "3," stares at it in disbelief. "Oh, God."

"Jesus!" the cook says. "You can't count." He shoves the third platter off the warmer.

"They didn't teach that in college," little Frankie chimes in. He turns his face from her as he lurches toward his machine with the loaded tray. His skinny, tattooed arms make two white bulges below the rolled-up t-shirt, his grimy neck is stiffened in advance for her retort. She says nothing.

Angie comes plunging in as Helen starts out. "Where the hell's my Delmonico?" she demands of the cook.

"Delmonico? That went out five minutes ago. Marlene took it."

"Marlene? That was *mine*, that's my single! Christ, the guy's been sitting there *twenty* minutes . . ."

"'My time is your time . . .'" the cook sings to her through cupped hands.

9:30. FLOOD TIDE. The high mark of happiness and greed in the big dining room. Whole steers consumed in little chunks, casks of liquor sipped away. Tribes of sea-creatures swallowed in the dim, current-wafted ambience of burbled conversation, pinafores waitresses, tinkling beach-glass. Soon now, sudden, the ebbing, and the delicate mood will wash out like the surf, leaving kelp and skeletons behind, Vinnie with the blazer and shark-tooth cufflinks, the snickering cash register in the bar.

But right now. Another four, Angie's six, two more deuces, and the mind whirs while the arms and hands, mouth and eyes and speech perform the art, smooth, quick, ingratiating, shrewd. Sour cream on your potato? Medium rare, no onions. More water here? French or Italian? Warm up your cup?

The eyes miss nothing: Vinnie standing by the hostess station with the new girl, Phyllis, the latest conquest. Watch: the little, scarcely-hidden murmurings, the winks, the pouts, the dropped menu, the big, coarse hand—the ex-butcher's hand—on the calf below the pinafore: prime. Meant to be seen. Vinnie's venal, self-pleased smile, the neglected teeth.

"Watch out for that s.o.b.," Jack reminds Helen at the bar. His own eyes are too vacant and diluted for such advice. She nods, drops the olives and lemon twists into the waiting martinis with

perfect precision, *plunk, plunk, plunk*. From behind, the cadence of the big feast clicks at her heels like some intricate sea-bug chasing her up, up on her toes. A sudden crash from the far side, a lull in the mechanical chatter. Angie. Veal parmegian on the carpet. A busboy's job now—but in this restaurant it is Frankie's mess to clean, a man for a boy's job. The mopping and vacuuming too, long after everyone else has gone.

Angie makes her way straight-faced toward the kitchen. Frankie will shout, "I'm not cleaning up any damn mess!, but Angie will shrug and ignore. "'*You got your troubles . . .*'" Angie, with the bad marriage and the stupid love affairs—not even affairs: in the parking lot once, in a van with some guy. Spite. Husband out, little girl home with a sitter, big fight after work.

"Go slow, be careful," Jack cautions again as Helen scoops up the drink tray. She smiles at his watery eyes. No need. Gently, lazily, the warm sea-current curls safe above the claw-waving, sand-dancing denizens. She delivers her drinks, drifts watchful round her station, with Vinnie fixed on the edge of her vision. Smooth, quick: coffee brown or demitasse? care to see our dessert menu? And Vinnie's image slowly enlarges, the burly build, the simulated manners, the knits and tailored slacks, pinky ring and Maltese-cross pendant with mood-stone tucked against sucked-in gut. And the traitorous teeth. A word, a nod, and Phyllis is sent forward with menus to take over Angie's new deuce. A minute later Angie emerges from the kitchen with a substitute platter. Little Frankie follows in her wake, a busboy's cutaway thrown over his filthy t-shirt. He looks like some strange cross between a hawk and a penguin as he stoops dark-faced over the spattered veal.

10:45. EBB TIDE. The last dinners are out, the slowpokes and stallers will keep everyone another hour or so. Set-ups for Sunday lunch are being prepared, the cooks are cleaning up. Little Frankie is lost behind a mountain of soiled dishes, the busboys are just warming up for their night of fun. In the big double sink, a whole evening's worth of blackened, crusted pots waits for Frankie's hard little hands. On the floor nearby, the mop and pail stand ready. Out back, where the busboys and car attendants have been sneaking wine all night, eight or ten full garbage cans wait to be hauled by Frankie to the back of the parking lot.

"Someone sent this for you, Frankie." The busboys, with poker-faces and many flourishes, set down a tray before him: a platter of picked bones and potato skins, a sundae of slop and ketchup. "The 'Buzzard's Banquet!'," and the boys, smothering laughs, scamper out back to their pals.

"Bastards," Frankie mutters, dumping the scraps. He glances

up at Helen. "I ought to knock them on their asses."

"It was only a joke, Frankie," Helen says. Too softly: a mistake—one does not speak softly to little Frankie. He looks at her, confused, a jumble of unpretty expressions gathering in his face. The slot machine whirs, the gargoyle masks shift and click; the look finally registers: Desire.

But before he can open his mouth to speak, Marlene comes hurrying into the kitchen. "Did you hear? Angie got fired. Just now."

"Fired? How come?"

"She had it out with Vinnie. I was right there. She started cursing at him, and he fired her."

"Where is she?"

"Up in the lounge, changing."

Helen goes, but Angie is quick, and already she is weaving through the dining room toward the front entrance with her coat on and the pinafore balled under her arm. Vinnie, arms across chest, stands at the main door. Angie lays the pinafore on the coat-check counter without a word and starts to walk past, but Vinnie blocks her way. "Wait a minute, where's the rest of it?" he says. "Where's the blouse?"

"I'm wearing it."

"That blouse is restaurant property. You leave it here."

"I didn't bring anything else to wear." Her voice is shrill, but beaten. The coat-check kid and the other waitresses stand watching. Vinnie's face darkens and he says cruelly "That's your problem, sister."

Angie wheels around and strides quickly, practically running, through the dining room and up the stairs. Helen starts after her, but a customer from her final deuce, an elderly woman, signals unmistakably. Helen stops at the table.

"Can you put this in a doggie bag for me?" the woman asks. On the plate lies a lone baked potato.

"If you like."

"And would you mind . . .," the woman looks up through thick bifocals, craning back as if focusing on Helen's features for the first time, ". . . putting a bone in too, for my dog?"

"A bone?"

"You know, from the garbage, a few bones."

"Oh . . . Sorry, I can't . . . it's a rule, Board of Health . . ." She moves away and turns toward the stairs. But Angie is already coming down, her coat carelessly open, her handbag dangling, an odd, stiff smile on her face. The skin inside the coat is white, the ridges of rib too sharp for the heavy breasts and mascaraed eyes.

"It's freezing out . . ." Helen begins, but Angie marches without swerving across the dining room and out the front door.

MIDNIGHT. All but a handful of the customers gone. The cooks are gone, the car attendants and coat-check girl are gone.

"What the hell is this, a party?" The words come seething along with Vinnie through the doors, and the waitresses stub out cigarettes and start up from the cooks' table to the unfolded linen and the coffee urns. "Where are the goddam busboys? Somebody's got to get the Professor out to his goddam car!"

Frankie starts untying his apron, but Vinnie waves him back. "Not you—get the vacuuming started. The rest of you close up your stations." He turns back, thrusts open the swinging door with his foot. "Where *are* those clowns?"

"Hiding," Frankie offers, but Vinnie has already gone through.

The door to the big freezer opens and the busboys file out, trailing aromatic smoke. Flushed, grinning, small-eyed, they step out of the cold in t-shirts and aprons. "Someone looking for *us*?" the last one says, the favorite, with the apple cheeks, the white neck, the innocent mouth; they laugh and shove one another and scramble out the back way to the parking lot.

Home stretch. The dining room carpet pulls at the heels like sand as the ash trays, sugar bowls, salt and pepper shakers are ferried back and forth to the condiment table. A lone eater sits in Marlene's station, an obese, bald, middle-aged man; a final patron stands at the bar, "the Professor," weekend regular, good tipper. The drone of the vacuum cleaner starts in the far corner, and in a booth nearby, the owner and his bleached-blond girlfriend have arrived for their weekly visitation. Vinnie sits with them, bent humbly over the Sunday ledger while the short-skirted, sad-faced girlfriend looks around bored, and the long-nosed owner, feigning diffidence, misses nothing with his quick, small eyes.

The expected happens: the Professor collapses at the bar, hitting the floor on his back and toppling one of the heavy wood stools. Vinnie and the owner hurry over, hunching on either side of the fallen man like big, dark birds. Vinnie calls to Jack for water, but the old guy, dazed, fails to understand. The blonde brings a glass from the table, and Vinnie makes meek passes with it over the Professor's face. When the blonde stoops to loosen his clothing, the owner shoves her and unintentionally sends her sprawling. "You don't touch them—you get sued," he says by way of apology.

When the Professor revives, he gets angry and tries to fight them away, and the three men struggle up like some sea-thing

with legs tangled and wings flapping. "Let go . . . let go!" the Professor sputters, pulling free, and totters away from them toward the stairs.

"Would you believe it?" Jack says, too loud, "*fourteen* old fashioned."

Helen empties her pockets at the waitress station and counts up. "A good night?" Marlene asks. "So-so." Through the window, the spotlights catch the glitter of ice tentacles, the sheen of black saucers in the parking lot below. Berthed in the shadow of the kitchen, a battered Falcon waits in its own island of light, its tailpipe splashing white froth along the asphalt: Frankie's wife. The orange point of a cigarette floats in the gloom of the driver's compartment, the legs of a sleeping child lie curled on the back seat.

Across the room, Jack closes up the bar. He smiles and nods in slow motion as Helen heads for the stairway to the lounge. On the landing, she pauses for a look down into the big room; from here the fat man has no eyes, just a soft, pink scalp with an eager, beak-like opening somewhere below. Frankie flicks the vacuum at him from beneath the landing, closer, closer. Pretending to be unwatched, he makes a show of the stringy muscles that squirm up the collar of his t-shirt.

"What are you doing up here?" The Professor emerges sullen and blear-eyed from the ladies' lounge, then waves the question away and turns shakily down the stairway. "It's the food," he mutters, "the goddam *shrimp* . . . blame the help . . ."

Inside, the lounge reeks of vomit. In the lavatory, the mess covers the toilet, the seat, the floor: more work for Frankie. Helen closes the lid, toes the flush lever, pulls the lavatory door shut behind her. In the outer room, she pulls off the pinafore and blouse. The landing door opens and Frankie's face comes poking in. "Oh, *you're* in here," he says, but the face does not withdraw, the obtrusive mop handle angles in underneath.

"Do you *mind*," she says.

"Sorry." But the haggard mask hangs inside the doorjamb for further seconds . . . then slowly recedes. The door closes.

Helen puts the blouse back on, pulls her heavy coat over it and buttons up. Bending for her handbag, she sees the trickle of water on the floor, hurries back into the lavatory, tiptoes through the puddle, pushes into the stall. The toilet labors, the water streams out under the seat. She flicks the lever again and again with her foot, then bends down hesitantly to jiggle it with her fingers. The roaring continues, the sea rises up.

Downstairs, everything is quiet, half the lights are shut. The Professor is gone, the fat man is gone, the owner and the blonde

are gone. Vinnie is behind the bar with Jack closing out the register, little Frankie is nowhere around. Phyllis, cigarette in hand and coat across knee, sits languidly on the furthest barstool awaiting her butcher's caress.

Helen goes up the bar. "Listen, Vinnie, there's a . . . "

"*Not now!*" he snaps, too nastily even for his money-counting fiats. His face colors—on Phyllis's account—but he doesn't look up. Before him, a length of register tape lies snarled among the stacks of currency. Jack too is engrossed in the inked symbols, the armies of numbers; but his eyes are unfocused, his lips faintly smiling. Phyllis clears her throat, shifts on her stool, mouths to Helen the silent word "*shortage*."

Helen turns and walks through the dining room toward the front door. Her shoulders hunch slightly as she crosses the carpet, as if at any moment big, briny drops will start pelting down from above. "Take care now," Jack calls belatedly, and she waves to him without turning. Her last glimpse as she pushes through the heavy, portholed door is of Vinnie crouching closer over his tormented document while Jack, his moist, prayerful eyes turned listlessly upward, seems to be wearily studying the ceiling.

Fraternity Ghosts

LARRY RUBIN

This house is not my home, and never was,
And yet its losses rankle deep, like old
Regrets—brothers I never really knew,
Those accidents that take the young, like glass
Jagged on the jugular, from broken
Table tops, or ladders projecting from diesels,
Where depot platforms have no guarding rail.
A suicide boy whose face was sylvan,
Soft, like the furs his father sold:
Sylvan Chajé! the music of your name
Rings even now across the lattices
Of time. I had to memorize it once,
To pass the test that pledges pass, and now
I don't go near that door. You know so much
About the house that's bigger than your father's
Store. Brother that I never knew,
Teach me to master the loss that must be mine—
To pass the test that brothers take, alone.

Suppose They Came Unbuttoned

PHILIP K. JASON

Suppose they came unbuttoned, all your charms,
and tumbled from the harnesses they filled,
and heaped themselves into my waiting arms.

Would you become perplexed and sound alarms,
or would you artfully contrive the way they spilled?
Suppose they came unbuttoned, all your charms,

revealing you a plain of arid farms—
the last grains swiftly harvested and milled
and heaped as loaves into my waiting arms?

And don't think it can't happen. All that swarms
around you now, those drones your radiance has chilled—
suppose they came unbuttoned, all your charms.

Suppose those talismans that kept you from harm's
way flew to me now, the one your glances killed,
and heaped themselves into my waiting arms?

All you have planned so long, the self you've tilled:
the skin, the mind, the heart—all you have willed;
suppose they came unbuttoned, all your charms,
and heaped themselves into my waiting arms.

of the current literary scene. Of course nothing is new: those of us who've taught the history of the novel are aware of such antiquities as *The Satyricon* and *The Decameron* (even if we haven't read them), not to mention their modern bargain-basement descendants like *Airport*. We told our students that the modern integrated novel developed out of this ancestry (and probably suggested that that growth was an improvement).

But whether Austen, James, and Forster were improvements or just developments, let's face it: the story-cycle is back; Boccaccio lives. He breathed pretty faintly in the Golden Age (in apprentice work like *Pickwick Papers*), and it was probably Joyce who resuscitated him (in *Dubliners*). Hemingway, Faulkner, and Sherwood Anderson picked up the torch and carried it down to contemporaries like Updike (*Bech: a Book*), Cheever (the Wapshot books), and Larry Woiwode (*Beyond The Bedroom Wall*).

The idea of a book made up of small discrete units but having a common character (or characters: Nick Adams, the Wapshots), locale (Winesburg, Ohio), and/or theme is, theoretically at least, justifiable. And it probably suits the modern existential temper well. It allows the writer to suggest character development, historical evolution, or place without the need for the kind of intricate sequential plotting that so many writers obviously feel is unsuitable to the modern sense of fragmentariness. It allows him to employ in a much more integral, prominent way the quasi-poetic resources (such as symbolism) that convey the ambiguity corollary to that sense that life doesn't hang together very well.

In this respect the cycle arises out of much the same urge that the short story itself does. And it is certainly not my intention to suggest that it always fails: *Bech* is far and away Updike's best work, and parts of the Wapshot books are fine indeed.

But the form is very risky. Woiwode's book is obviously a collection of miscellaneous pieces by a man of talent stitched together in the most perfunctory fashion, and Cheever's cycle is in no way as convincing as his superlative single short stories. Cohesiveness is a big problem. The level of quality in Cheever's collected *Stories* varies (though not much!), but there we expect no compelling forward thrust (of action, character, or theme) as we do (and don't fully get) in his cycle. For him and Woiwode merely to say that all the pieces in the cycle deal with a certain family is not enough.

I suspect that these problematic cycles are often an unsatisfactory substitute for novel-writing, which Americans have often quite wrongly conceived of as where the action is. There must be a special literary graveyard for moribund novels by gifted short story writers like Hemingway, Katherine Ann Porter (*Ship of Fools*), Eudora Welty (*Losing Battles*), John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, and Vladimir

Nabokov (always excepting *Lolita*). (Outside America, D. H. Lawrence was an infinitely better story-writer than novelist; outside the short story, compare Edward Albee's good short plays to his miserable long ones). Why did these masters of the small turn big?—probably a combination of finances, the American obsession with big (see John Keenan, *supra*), and the challenge of a fundamentally different kind of writing. Whatever the reason—and rare ambidextrous figures like James, Cather, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald aside—its largely a matter of fish or fowl.

The story-cycle is a compromise—all too often an unstable hybrid—between the demands of the novel (fully sustained and plotted narration) and those of the short story (concentrated dramatic intensity, a maximum of scene and a minimum of summary, and an almost poetic suggestiveness). Boccaccio probably wouldn't have understood such a yearning for some kind of unity, but we have it. I want to suggest that the emphasis must be primarily on the latter. *Bech* has a certain novelistic thrust to it, but it's primarily valuable because any unit of it is detachable and can stand by itself. The story of the housewife and the delivery boy from *The Wapshot Scandal* is a classic. (It forms the basis of the book's plot, but the book is mainly about the aftermath of the affair and about other characters' reaction to it. Cheever is obviously veering toward the novel form, but the best part is a self-contained story. Cheever's had mixed luck with the novel).

End of historical and critical lecture. Or almost. As I've indicated before, I'd like to use this forum to suggest how what I know best (historical and critical analysis) relates to what writers know best (the creation of dramatic reality), for the benefit of us both—and of readers who belong to neither party.

To quote myself: "A good story . . . takes note—consciously—of its ancestry." Many of you who are trying to follow the tradition of the story-cycle need to take stock. Read (or, as we say in academe, reread) the literature—not to copy it, of course, but to be aware of its pitfalls as well as its glories. And decide—if you're a closet novelist, come out, come out. I know that many of our contributors are working on novels as well as their short things; and who knows?—maybe there's a James or a Faulkner among them. I hope so. But many of those who are doing story-cycles (a group quite distinct from the ambidextrous ones) should probably make a hard single commitment to one or the other.

Here are two typical cases. The novelistic excerpt: a piece of short-story length which drops names and prior incidents like mad ("He remembered what Catherine had told him in the park that fateful Sunday"), but which doesn't tell us who Catherine is, what she told him, or why the Sunday was fateful. Of course no one is this delib-

erately vague or teasing; on the contrary, the usual temptation is to tell the reader too much about such matters. The material's there somewhere—in pages 1-186 of the "cycle." But that's no use to me, reading this excerpt. The person who writes this way is a novelist, no matter what he calls himself. And maybe a good one. But whether or not, he—and I—would be much better off if he'd think of himself that way.

Even more exasperating is the mood excerpt, which tells us all about the inner state of the character and artfully dwells on symbol, point of view, etc. but which tells us nothing about the character's concrete situation. (That's *all* in pp. 1-186). In this case Catherine isn't even mentioned. On two occasions I wrote encouraging letters of rejection to an author, and on both occasions he wrote back telling me all about the character's situation. His implication was that I was somehow supposed to intuit all this material. But how could I when it was all on pages he hadn't sent me? This sort of writer is harder to size-up—he's either a closet novelist or a short story writer *manqué* who hasn't learned Jamesian "solidity of specification."

Of course I don't mean to appear an old fogey, that is, to appear to rule out the story cycle. It arises out of a real need, occupies an honorable experimental place, and has shown itself to have real creative vitality. And I'm sure there are some who have fully assessed their position and are consciously pursuing the course set by its originators. But to all I want to say this: remember that the small self-contained unit—that delicate balance of explicit and suggestive, of concrete and spiritual that we call the short story—has its unique uses and charms. To be practical, I can use only pieces that stand on their own, that give the reader insight into a particular moment of human life. On a broader plane, to think small is—in literary terms—no sin.

J.C.K.

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